

Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety & Depression in Response to COVID-19 among Individuals with Serious Mental Illness

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This study reports the results of a multisite survey of individuals with serious mental illness regarding the impact of the COVID-19 response on symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Background

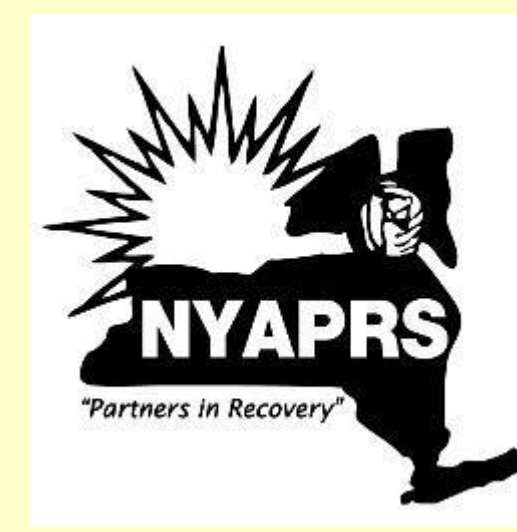
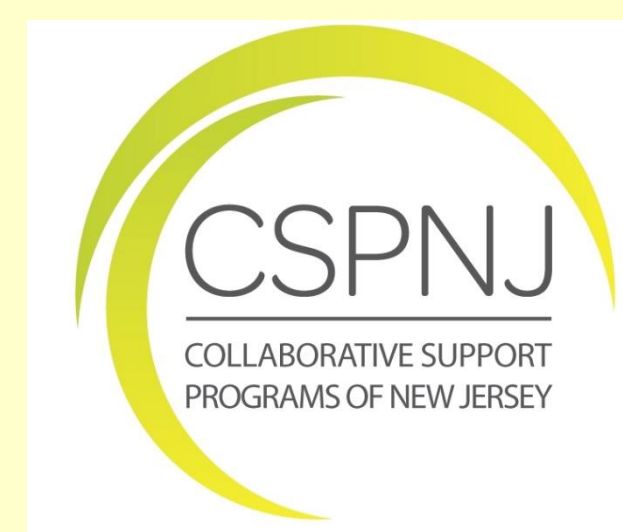
The impact of COVID-19 has been felt within the general population throughout the world. As is the case globally, multiple groups have been identified as high-risk populations with heightened vulnerability to coronavirus infection overall, as well as to its morbidity and mortality. Included among these groups are people with higher rates of pre-existing underlying health and mental health conditions, including serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, and bipolar disorder.

Methods

Individuals with serious mental illness (N=272) were recruited via email and web announcements asking for volunteers to participate in a brief survey regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their mental health and well-being. Survey respondents included individuals recruited from community mental health programs in New York state (n=82) and New Jersey (n=190).

Survey measures included the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder questionnaire (GAD-2), aspects of well-being, and demographic information. Participants were asked about changes in their mental health, well-being, sleep, diet, and community status as related to COVID-19, pandemic quarantine, and social distancing.

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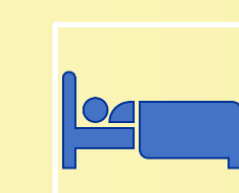
Results

Nearly 1/3 of all respondents screened positive for Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or both.

Those screening positive for Major Depressive Disorder were more likely to report:



Changes in eating habits (p<.001)



Changes in sleep patterns (p<.001)



Trouble getting medications (p=.033)



Needed healthcare but could not get it (p<.001)

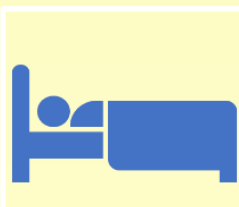


Those with higher education level were more likely to report Depressed Mood (p=.029)

Those screening positive for Generalized Anxiety Disorder were more likely to report:



Changes in eating habits (p=.003)



Changes in sleep patterns (p<.001)



Trouble getting medications (p=.034)



Needed healthcare but could not get it (p<.001)



Change in living arrangement (p=.033)



Black participants were less likely to report Anxiety symptoms (p<.001)

Study population				
Characteristics	Total (N=272)	CSPNJ (N=190)	NYAPRS (N=82)	P-value
Gender				NS
Female	155 (57.0)	103 (56.9)	52 (68.4)	
Male	98 (36.0)	76 (42.0)	22 (28.9)	
Non-binary	1 (0.4)	0	1 (1.3)	
Transgender	3 (1.1)	2 (1.1)	1 (1.3)	
Age (x, SD, Range)	49.9 (13.5, 21-80)	49.5 (13.4, 21-76)	50.9 (13.6, 22-80)	NS
Race				
African American/Black	72 (26.5)	59 (31.1)	13 (15.9)	p=.010
White	143 (52.6)	90 (47.4)	53 (64.6)	p=.010
Asian	9 (3.3)	7 (3.7)	2 (2.4)	NS
Native American	1 (0.4)	1 (0.5)	0	NS
Other	32 (11.8)	24 (12.6)	8 (9.8)	NS
Ethnicity				
Latinx	35 (12.9)	26 (13.7)	9 (11.0)	NS
Education				p<.001
High school or less	65 (25.3)	61 (33.7)	4 (5.3)	
Some college	59 (23.0)	50 (27.6)	9 (11.0)	
At least college grad	133 (51.8)	70 (38.7)	63 (76.8)	

Responses to Depression & Anxiety Screening Items				
Screening Questionnaire	Total (N=272)	CSPNJ (N=190)	NYAPRS (N=82)	P-value
PHQ-2 Depression Screen (x, SD)	1.82 (1.76)	1.73 (1.69)	2.04 (1.91)	NS
GAD-2 Anxiety Screen (x, SD)	2.30 (2.03)	2.14 (1.94)	2.69 (2.20)	p=.045
Major Depressive Disorder Screen (cutoff score >=3)	77 (29.6)	50 (27.2)	27 (35.5)	NS
Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screen (cutoff score >=3)	92 (35.1)	58 (31.4)	34 (44.2)	p=.048
Screened + for MDD and GAD (score >=3)	60 (22.9)	36 (19.5)	24 (31.2)	p=.040

Conclusions

People with serious mental illness experience feelings of depression & anxiety in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of respondents reported changes in regular daily activities, such as sleep disturbance and altered diet.

Respondents reported obstacles to health management, such as access to medications or needed healthcare services.